



Water Cleanup Plans

Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs)

Why Develop Water Cleanup Plans?

Water Cleanup Plans will result in cleaner lakes, streams, rivers, and bays. Clean water is vital for our quality of life – for both economic development and a healthy environment. Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs or Water Cleanup Plans) are one way to return our water bodies to a healthy condition. TMDLs describe the type, amount and sources of water pollution in a particular water body; they analyze how much the pollution needs to be reduced or eliminated to meet water quality standards; and they provide targets and strategies to control the pollution.

Community involvement is a vital part of developing water cleanup plans and to putting the plans into action. The local community, with the Department of Ecology's support and assistance needs to be involved to help determine how pollution will be reduced to improve water quality.

How Does The Water Cleanup Process Work?

The federal Clean Water Act requires states to prepare a list of water bodies that do not meet water quality standards for ensuring the water is healthy for such uses as fish and wildlife habitat, domestic and agricultural water supplies, and recreation in and on the water. All water bodies identified on the list must attain water quality standards within a reasonable period, either through a Water Cleanup Plan (TMDL) or other pollution control mechanisms. The U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) reviews and approves this list every two years.

Ecology organizes water cleanup efforts through geographic areas called Water Quality Management Areas (WQMA). Each WQMA is made up of one or more watersheds or Water Resource Inventory Areas (WRIAs). There are 62 WRIAs in Washington State. Each year, with the help of local communities, Ecology selects WRIAs or watersheds where water cleanup plans (TMDLs) will be developed.

Once a watershed has been selected, existing and new data about the water bodies is gathered. The analysis and modeling of the data, along with conclusions and recommendations on how to reduce or eliminate the pollution from its sources, is included in a technical report. From these recommendations and conclusions, a Summary Implementation Strategy (SIS) is developed which outlines what activities will be initiated to reduce the pollution. Once this strategy is put in place the success of the activities will be evaluated through effectiveness monitoring.

What is the schedule for Washington's cleanup plans?

As a result of a 1998 legal settlement, the Department of Ecology (Ecology) has until 2013 to develop and implement plans to clean up 643 polluted water bodies. Most listed water bodies are affected by more than one pollutant. Ecology will be working with local governments, tribes, businesses and citizens to develop plans or solutions to improve water quality.

How are Cleanup Plans implemented?

For point sources (pollution that generally comes out of a pipe or an activity that has a wastewater or stormwater permit), discharge permits contain limits developed in the TMDL. For pollution from nonpoint sources (pollution that comes from many, varied sources such as

A watershed is a geographic area where any drop of rain will drain to a single body of water such as a lake or river.

septic tanks, vehicles, farms, pets, household and garden chemicals, and more), Ecology works with other agencies, local governments, landowners, and citizens to identify and implement specific pollution controls or “best management practices (BMPs).”

How does Ecology ensure compliance with the Water Cleanup Plan/TMDL?

Today nonpoint pollution sources represent the biggest impact on water quality. Therefore, Ecology relies on positive working relationships with local governments, tribes, watershed groups and private landowners to ensure that best management practices (BMPs) are implemented and managed. Our goal is to identify solutions and water quality improvement activities with the assistance and support of local landowners and implement those solutions on a voluntary basis.

Certainly if there is a significant pollution discharge from a private property, Ecology would approach the landowner and encourage Best Management Practices to mitigate the adverse effects of the discharge, or the situation may be referred to the local conservation district for possible improved practices, plans, or correction. Ultimately, Ecology will use a combination of tools – including education, technical and financial assistance, wastewater discharge permits, and compliance actions to improve the quality of water bodies. Enforcement can be used, but it is the least desirable option.

How is the clean up of waters progressing?

Since 1992, EPA has approved more than 288 Water Cleanup Plans developed by Ecology, local governments, or consultants. Ecology is currently working on approximately 103 TMDLs. Between July 2002 and June 30, 2003 Ecology plans to submit 50 of these TMDLs to EPA for approval.

Process for a typical water cleanup plan

